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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 002292

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, SEMEP, AND IPA; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL KWBG KPAL PINS IS

SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY POLICE CHIEF ON WEST BANK SECURITY

REF: JERUSALEM 2210

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein  
for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Palestinian Authority (PA) Civil Police Chief Hazim Atallah told Post that PA security forces were focused on settler-Palestinian violence and a possible upcoming large-scale prisoner release by Israel. He said that preparations to prevent the former and manage the latter are underway. Atallah criticized Israeli security forces for, in his view, failing to take appropriate responsibility for the safety of Palestinians in areas of the West Bank where PA security forces are not allowed to operate. Even so, he said that his first meeting with the new Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Central Commander, Major General Avi Mizrahi, had been "encouraging" regarding PA-GOI security cooperation. End summary.

PA EFFORTS TO PREVENT RETALIATION FOR SETTLER VIOLENCE

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¶2. (C) In a December 14 meeting in Ramallah, Atallah said the PA security establishment was deeply concerned about future attacks on Palestinians by Israeli settlers imposing a "price tag" on the GOI's ten-month moratorium on new residential construction in West Bank settlements. "This is the most sensitive issue facing the PA security sector," he said. "(The moratorium is) a disaster at the political level, but also for us, in the security services, it's not easy." He noted that any Palestinian retaliation would carry a heavy political price for the PA, saying, "This is the most efficient way of destroying what we've built. We're being put to the test -- we're asking people not to do anything, asking them to stand down when they're under attack."

IDF'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR SECURITY IN AREAS B AND C

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¶3. (C) Atallah said that PA security forces, barred from operating in Areas B and C of the West Bank, could not protect Palestinians living there from extremist settlers. "I told the Israelis, this is not the responsibility of PA security forces. It's the Israelis' job, it's their citizen who's involved," he said. Criticizing the IDF for inaction in the face of an increasingly risky security scenario in the West Bank, he said, "I don't know what to say to our people. They're working in the fields, they're in their homes, and they're under attack. Now it's a mosque that's targeted. What am I supposed to say to them, 'stay still?'" He asked, "are the settlers stronger than the Israeli government? I don't believe so. And if they're not, the Israeli government should do something about this."

PA IN THE DARK ABOUT GOI PRISONER RELEASE

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¶4. (C) Atallah noted that PA security forces are preparing for the possibility of a large-scale prisoner release by Israel related to negotiations over kidnapped IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. "We're working on scenarios to be able to handle this," Atallah said. "But the Israelis have to tell us who's going to be released, and where. They're not authorized to surprise us." He continued, "we (the PA) can't oppose this (publicly). The guys who will be released are Palestinians -- we have to be happy. But how do we handle this without giving Hamas the chance to build on this? That's very important. And so far, we have no information from the Israeli side."

NABLUS STANDOFF A "RED LINE"

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¶5. (C) Regarding the November 29 altercation between personnel of the PA's National Security Force (NSF) and the Civil Police (reftel), Atallah said, "this was painful for all of us. After all that we've accomplished -- I'm not afraid of Hamas, I'm not afraid of Israel. I'm afraid of our ability to destroy with our own two hands what we've made." Noting that the PA had taken swift action to discipline and replace the officers involved, he said, "Me and (NSF West Bank Commander) Abu al-Fatah will never let this (destruction) happen. Immediately, the necessary precautions were taken. This is a red line, the kind of thing that no one will accept. We paid a lot for this kind of chaos in past years -- this is how we lost Gaza."

FIRST MEETING WITH MIZRAHI "ENCOURAGING"

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JERUSALEM 00002292 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Atallah reported that he had recently met with the new IDF Central Commander, Major General Avi Mizrahi. Atallah said the meeting provided a chance "for him to see us, for us to tell him our principles. That we want peace, that we don't have another way of achieving our national goals." Atallah continued, "I told Mizrahi about the speech (Prime Minister Salam) Fayyad gave (recently) to a police unit graduating from training in Tubas, how the Prime Minister made clear that there would be no more chaos, no more intifadas, no matter what the cost is, no matter if we pay with our lives. We're not doing this for the Israelis. We're doing this for the future of our children."

¶7. (C) Atallah added that many in the IDF still fear the PA security forces from the years of the Second Intifada. "They can't forget. And we can't forget IDF attacks on our cities, our people." He noted, however, that Mizrahi had not fought in either Intifada. "He's never worked with Palestinians before," Atallah said, theorizing that Mizrahi's lack of Intifada experience could mean that he does not harbor negative preconceived notions of the PA security forces.

RUBINSTEIN